

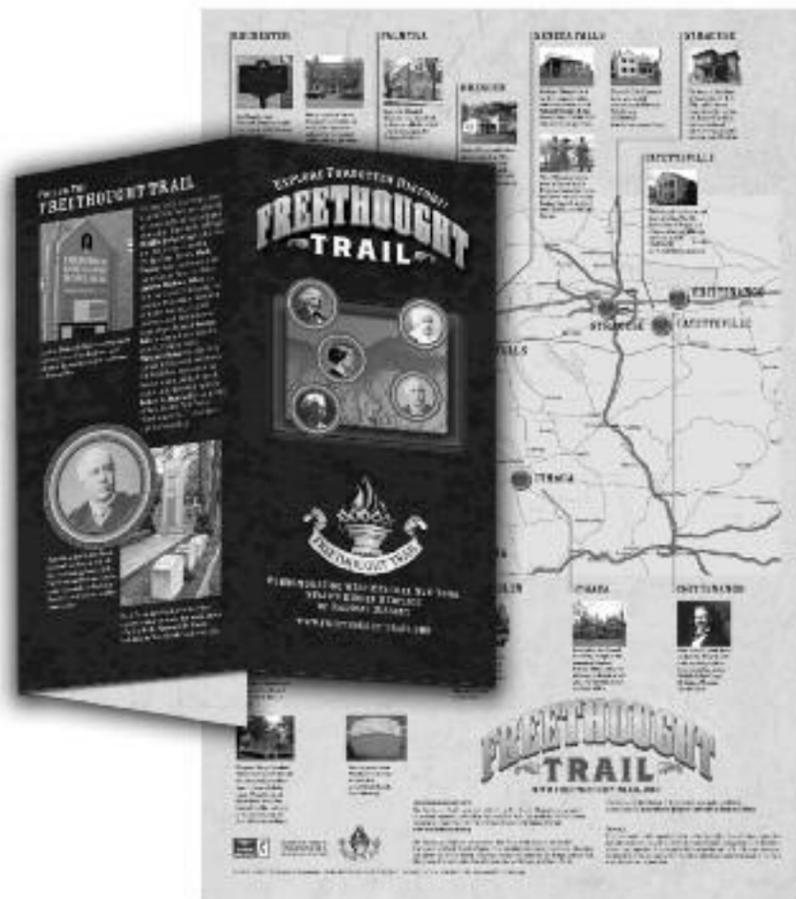
FREETHOUGHT TRAIL

The Ingersoll Museum is proud to be a founding attraction of the Freethought Trail! In the 19th century, west-central New York was a hotbed of social, political, and religious innovation.

Fayetteville suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage called religion the enemy of women. Writing from Elmira, Mark Twain raised irreverence to an American art form. At Ithaca, Andrew Dickson White co-founded Cornell University, the nation's first secular institution of higher learning. In 1848 reformers and freethinkers of every stripe thronged Seneca Falls to demand new roles for women.

Corning native Margaret Sanger led the 20th-century birth control movement. Online at www.freethought-trail.org (note the hyphen), the informal Freethought Trail now includes about eighty sites, marked and unmarked. All are within a two-hour drive of the Ingersoll Museum and all pertain to the region's rich history of radical reform: freethought, women's rights, abolitionism, sex radicalism, anarchism, and more. Visiting west-central New York this summer or fall? Let the Freethought Trail site be your guide to a fascinating, historical, and fuel-efficient visit. Choose the attractions you want to visit in the order you wish to visit them, and receive reliable turn-by-turn directions for your entire trip.

JOIN US ... ON THE FREETHOUGHT TRAIL!
WWW.FREETHOUGHT-TRAIL.ORG



THE INGERSOLL

The Newsletter of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum and the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee

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MUSEUM HOURS 2012

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum will be open at 61 Main St., Dresden, N.Y., from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day weekend through Hallowe'en (May 26–October 28, 2012). Suggested admission is only \$2.00!

MEET THE SPONSOR NEW JERSEY SURGEON SPONSORS 2012 SEASON



Dr. Michael Bilof, sponsor of the 2012 Ingersoll Birthplace Museum season

Chalk it up to something Robert Green Ingersoll would understand: the power of the word.

“By way of background, 2010 had been a dramatic year,” recalled Tom Flynn, director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. “The furnace and the roof needed replacing, one after the other. We launched an emergency appeal to fund those repairs so it would not be necessary to

go into the Museum's small endowment, and our supporters really came through in mid-2010. So I suppose as we went into 2011, there was an issue with donor fatigue.” Response to last year's spring fund appeal was startlingly small, and as the 2011 season progressed there was real concern that the Museum might go into deficit, in which case it might not have opened at all in 2012. “I wrote an impassioned fall appeal letter,” Flynn recalled. “I laid out what was fast becoming a desperate situation and implored Ingersoll aficionados to respond.”

Respond they did—none more than Jersey City, New Jersey, bariatric surgeon Michael Bilof, who made gifts totaling \$15,000, underwriting the entire costs of the Museum's 2012 season.

“Well, it worked,” said Dr. Bilof of that late-2011 appeal. “I decided this would be one of my largest charitable gifts of that year.” Bilof is a long-time subscriber to *Free Inquiry* magazine and a regular contributor to the Council for Secular Humanism and its supporting organization, the Center for Inquiry. But never before had he made a contribution on this scale.

Interestingly, Dr. Bilof reports no special link to Ingersoll. And he's never visited the Museum, “though I think I'll try to this year,” he says wryly. He traces his emergence as a secular humanist—and his connection to the Council—to reading Carl Sagan's 1997 book *The Demon-Haunted World: Science As a Candle in the Dark*, which mentioned the organization. In 2011, he recounts, “I put my money where my mouth is.”

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is grateful and proud to acknowledge Dr. Bilof as the sponsor of the 2012 Museum season. A plaque acknowledging his generosity has been sent to his home, and a second plaque will be on permanent display at the Museum thanking him for his season sponsorship. Three full seasons—2007, 2008, and 2012—have now been sponsored by individual gifts of \$15,000 or more.

SECRETS OF THE TWENTY-EIGHT-INCH INGERSOLL BUST REVEALED!

In its last issue, the *Ingersoll Report* described the Museum's acquisition of a unique bust of Robert Green Ingersoll. Twenty-eight inches tall and sporting a dark-bronze finish, the plaster bust is more than twice the size of the more familiar thirteen-inch bust of a bald Ingersoll. It also depicts “Royal Bob” earlier in his life, his head still crowned by tufts of hair. Gifted by antiquarian bookseller C. E. Van Norman, this bust's unique characteristics were obvious. But its origins were unknown—until now.

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The Newsletter of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum and the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee

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Copies of this 13" Ingersoll bust, mass-produced in the early twentieth century, are relatively common. By contrast the Museum's new 28" bust (no photo available) is extremely rare and may be the only casting made.

Research by indefatigable volunteer (and Ingersoll family descendant) Jeff Ingersoll and Center for Inquiry Libraries Director Timothy Binga have pierced the secrets of this hitherto-undocumented work of art. After the bust was displayed "as is" during the Museum's 2011 season, Jeff Ingersoll made arrangements for it to be repaired and refinished at the Art Conservation Clinic of Buffalo State College. Before doing so, he scrutinized the bust closely. The back of the bust bore three faint but still-readable inscriptions. Across the shoulder blades was the word "Ingersoll" in tall outlined letters. Along the bottom, left and right, respectively, were inscribed "M. A. Breed Sc." and "1873." Based on well-known photographs of Ingersoll, the amount of hair shown on the bust is consistent with that year, when Ingersoll was forty. But who was M. A. Breed, and why would he sculpt, much less cast, a bust of Robert Ingersoll at a time when the Great Agnostic had not yet achieved nationwide prominence? Three years before his "Plumed Knight" speech nominating James G. Blaine at the 1876 Republican National Convention in Cincinnati would make him a national figure, Ingersoll was already prominent and revered in his adopted hometown of Peoria, Illinois. Here, after all, he had raised his Civil War regiment and earned his lifelong title of Colonel Ingersoll. Here, in 1873, he was still engaged in the practice of law.

As it happens, M. A. Breed was also a Peorian in 1873.

Breed's story comes from an 1892 genealogical work, *A Record of*



Inscription by the dealer and perhaps the sculptor, Peoria art dealer M. A. Breed.

the Descendants of Allen Breed, Who Came to America from England in 1830, published by Hathaway and Brothers of Philadelphia:

M. A. Breed learned the drug business with Dr. Shaw in Fulton, New York, came west in 1848, clerked for J. G. McCreery, Rushville, Illinois, and subsequently for Dr. Hoffman, Quincy, Illinois; went to California in 1852, returned in 1857, settled in Peoria in the same year, sold out in 1867, went to Europe in 1868, opened in Chicago a fine store of fancy goods brought from Germany and Italy in 1869, sold out and returned to Peoria in 1871, where he now resides, and has the credit of having the finest store of fine arts and fancy goods west of the Alleghany Mountains.

The story of the twenty-eight-inch bust can now be inferred. Breed, Peoria's leading art dealer, either commissioned or sculpted a bust of Robert Ingersoll. That may have been the end of it, or a small number of plaster copies may have been offered on the local or, at most, statewide market. Did Breed hire an unknown artist, or was he himself the sculptor? His biography describes him as an art dealer but does not hint that he had artistic skills. On the other hand, the biography does not indicate the attainment of any license, degree, or professional certificate that might account for the "Sc." inscribed after Breed's name on the back of the bust. Perhaps it was meant to indicate that Breed himself was the sculptor.

In any case, the mysteries surrounding the only known Ingersoll bust of this size are largely solved. The bust was indeed sculpted early in Ingersoll's life, in Peoria, the only place where anyone might have been interested in a bust of Robert Ingersoll at that early stage in his career. The bust's promoter (and perhaps its sculptor) was in Peoria at that time, and marketing of an Ingersoll bust would have dovetailed perfectly with his line of work. Finally, the fact that this bust would have been a product of only local or regional appeal helps to account for its rarity.

It is expected that Buffalo State College will finish restoration of the bust at some time during the 2012 season, and that the restored Breed bust will go back on display in the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum as soon as practical thereafter.

SEE IT AT THE INGER-HUT

Acquired from an online seller in 2011, this 4-1/4" x 6-1/2" "cabinet card" dates from the very early twentieth century. It was issued by the American Secular Union, one of the principal national nontheist organizations of the period. The card shows a composite image: a seated group of freethinkers, including Ingersoll, and above it the Dobbs Ferry, New York, mansion where Ingersoll died. Captioned on the back, the card notes (helpfully if ungrammatically) that "The two lower windows to the left is [sic] the room in which he died."

Captions also name the seven individuals sitting for the group photo. It is unknown on what occasion they were photographed. The sitters are:
[top row, left to right]

1. E. M. Sellon

Little is known about this person except that he served as recording secretary of the New York State Freethinkers Association, which despite its name was a national organization.

2. Eva A. Ingersoll

Robert's wife.

3. W. S. Bell

This minister-turned-Liberal lecturer was arrested alongside *Truth Seeker* publisher D. M. Bennett and activist Josephine Tilton at the 1878 New York State Freethinker's Association Conference in Watkins Glen, New York.

4. H. L. Green.

Freethought lecturer and publisher, edited the *Freethinkers' Magazine*, a national publication long based in Buffalo, New York.

[bottom row, left to right]

5. Mrs. E. M. Sellon.

6. Robert Green Ingersoll.

7. Mrs. H. L. Green.

